

**TESTIMONY TO
COMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON AFRICA, GLOBAL HUMAN RIGHTS,
AND INTERNATIONAL OPERATIONS**

**RICHARD W. SOUDRIETTE
PRESIDENT
INTERNATIONAL FOUNDATION FOR ELECTION SYSTEMS (IFES)
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BACKGROUND

On behalf of my organization, the International Foundation for Election Systems (IFES), I wish to thank you for taking the initiative to hold this hearing to focus attention on the important question of elections in Angola.

The 27-year Angolan Civil War, which followed the collapse of the Portuguese colonial regime, claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands of Angolans and disrupted the lives of millions more. It tore the country apart and created divisions that have hampered the economic and social development of this potentially prosperous country.

In 1991 following signing of the Bicesse Accords in Lisbon, the leadership of the two warring factions—the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) and the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA)—agreed to end hostilities and embrace multi-party democracy. The United Nations Security Council approved the establishment of the United Nations Angola Verification Mission, which was charged with providing security and overseeing the first multi-party elections in the country's history.

The elections were conducted on September 29 and 30, 1992, and resulted in a return to civil war after the competing UNITA and MPLA parties were unable to resolve electoral disputes that arose. In that election President José Eduardo dos Santos garnered 49 percent of the vote against 40 percent for Jonas Savimbi, the leader of UNITA and a candidate for president. Neither achieved the 50 percent threshold required to be declared the winner. Therefore, according to the electoral law, there should have been a second round.

As we contemplate the next elections, it is vital that we examine what happened in 1992 and learn the important lessons. Angola in 1992 teaches us two crucial ones. First, that without sufficient political will on the part of a nation's leaders, no amount of international support will result in acceptable elections. Second, I conclude that technical assistance to elections must be conducted in a transparent and effective manner. This is best achieved by building independent and professional electoral management bodies. The United States can assist the upcoming Angolan electoral process by strengthening the National Electoral Commission in organizing independent, impartial and honest elections.

IFES IN ANGOLA

IFES' engagement in the Angolan electoral process began in 1992, with a small pre-election civic education campaign and an observer mission to the September 29-30 legislative and presidential elections. The IFES Mission concluded that—despite sporadic procedural violations, ballot design flaws, and a cumbersome vote count and tabulation process—the irregularities identified would not have had a material impact on the outcome of the elections. However, the failure of the Bicesse Accords to produce an environment conducive to the acceptance of electoral outcomes, as well as real and lasting disarmament and demobilization of armed factions, precluded the possibility of elections yielding a result endorsed by all sides.

Following the 1992 elections, the 1994 Lusaka Protocol failed to secure peace in Angola. Nevertheless, in 1999, President José Eduardo dos Santos announced that elections would take place in 2001. These were subsequently postponed and, in late 2001, IFES—along with the International Republican Institute (IRI) and the National Democratic Institute (NDI)—conducted a pre-election assessment mission to determine the prospects for holding general elections. The resulting report provided benchmarks from which to gauge Angola's readiness for elections and detailed assistance that could facilitate progress toward those benchmarks.

In 2002, IFES launched a series of technical assessment and short-term assistance missions, with the government making tepid progress toward fulfilling the commitments made in 1999 along the way. Since 2002, IFES has sent four teams to advise emerging electoral authorities on how to proceed with preparations, the most recent of which was a November 2005 consultative mission to assess the:

- **election framework;**
- **mandate of the National Election Commission (CNE);**
- **voter registration process;**
- **strengths, weaknesses and challenges envisioned by the current election timeline;**
- **role of the other Angolan government entities; and**
- **donor funding for elections.**

On the part of the Angolan authorities, efforts have been made to establish an election administration infrastructure that comes closer to international standards. However, beyond providing newly created electoral institutions with a legal mandate, little real progress has been made.

THE FUTURE

Each IFES mission to Angola has been followed by detailed recommendations for how to proceed, both on the part of international assistance providers and local actors. Follow through on these recommendations, however, has been disappointing, particularly with respect to honoring timetables for election preparations. In the future, real commitment to moving the electoral process

forward on schedule and a sustained, onsite technical assistance program are needed to capitalize on the establishment of electoral institutions and all of the assessment work that has been done.

As noted above, only one national election has been held in Angola—in 1992, during a hiatus in the war—but the results were rejected and civil conflict resumed. This time, although a return to war is not seen as a serious threat, there are a number of obstacles that must be overcome before credible elections can be held. First of all, a calendar for presidential and parliamentary elections must be agreed upon by all relevant actors: political parties, civil society and government. Although President Dos Santos has hinted that the polls may not occur before 2007, no official announcement has been made. People speak blithely of “upcoming elections,” but very little of the hard, organizational work has been done. This is worrisome as the law only requires that the president give 90 days notice before calling elections, allowing for little time to prepare properly. Above all, clarity must be reached on actual dates for the various steps involved in elections, such as party and candidate registration, ballot design, polling place designation, materials procurement, training of poll workers and electoral officials, campaign financing, observation and accreditation, etc. Another major hurdle facing Angolans is voter registration, which is said to be proceeding at a glacial pace. These are all tasks that will fall to the National Electoral Commission, assuming that body is fully empowered and adequately funded by the Angolan government and international assistance bodies, such as USAID.

IFES stands ready to work with the Angolan government, political parties of all stripes, and civil society to carry out credible elections that will lay the foundation for a better future for all Angolans.

Thank you very much.